



Espresso cart program offers hope with each cup of coffee

by Terri Jack, Washington Service Corps

Washington Service Corps members Aaron Low and Muang Saechao serve with the Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) in Seattle.

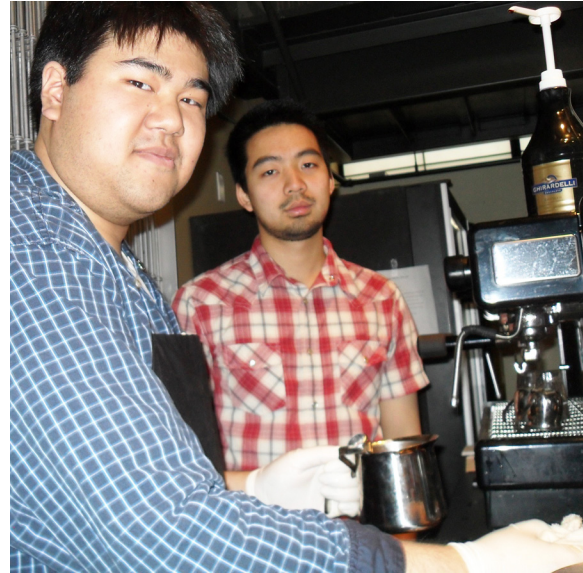
They support the organization's *Café Hope Espresso Project*, a job training program for behavioral-health clients aged 19 to 50. Participants typically have various cognitive or emotional barriers to employment, and their levels of functionality vary wildly.

Aaron and Muang provide training in food safety, customer service, making espresso beverages and basic business concepts. With the skills they learn, clients then operate an espresso cart two to four days a week at the project site.

The Service Corps members provide supervision at the barista stand, but the clients make the drinks and interact with customers. It's a low-pressure environment where clients can learn, ask questions and conquer their fears about customer service.

"The espresso stand's effect on our clients has been inspirational," said Aaron. "One graduate told me that she felt 'powerful and confident in herself and her abilities,' feelings that she had never felt before. I feel so privileged to be part of such an empowering project."

Since the project started in January 2011, five participants have enrolled. One has progressed so well that he enrolled and graduated from the job-readiness training class offered by ACRS.



Washington Service Corp member Aaron Low (left) and client.

Muang was attracted to this particular Service Corps position because the agency aims to support and empower community members, especially those of Asian-Pacific Islander descent.

"What they provide to people in our community is my passion, and it's something I've grown up doing for my own parents," said Muang. "It's a part of me and I can't escape it!"

"The espresso stand's effect on our clients has been inspirational," said Aaron. "One graduate told me that she felt 'powerful and confident in herself and her abilities,' feelings that she had never felt before. I feel so privileged to be part of such an empowering project."

Contact: Terri Jack, 360-486-5907